

BY BARBARA SPECTOR

When daughters succeed their dads

BACK IN 2004, *Family Business* published an article on cross-gender succession by family business advisers Dennis Jaffe and Fredda Herz Brown. Daughters who succeed their fathers as head of the family firm, Jaffe and Brown wrote, “understand that there are issues, emotions and complex roles to negotiate, so their instinct is to slowly develop trust with their father and other employees.”

In a new book, lead editor Daphne Halkias, aided by a team of three co-editors and about 60 contributing authors, addresses father-to-daughter succession around the globe from an academic perspective. In the book's epilogue, Halkias notes that the emotional connection between father and daughter appears to play a role in generational transitions worldwide: “No matter which cultural prism we gazed through to tell the daughter's story,” she writes, “the understanding of emotional ties between father and daughter were paramount to studying the succession process.”

In her acknowledgments, Halkias—a psychologist and business consultant who is affiliated with the University of Bergamo in Italy, Cornell University, the University of California, San Diego and Harvard Medical School's McLean Hospital—explains that the book grew out of her experience as a visiting professor at the American College of Greece, where she surveyed female students from family business backgrounds on their intentions to succeed their fathers.

Father-Daughter Succession in Family Business includes 28 research articles, organized geographically. Most feature a case study based on interviews with a female

family business member. (One article includes two case studies.) Some of the companies and principals are named; others are pseudonymous or anonymous.

In most cases, the primary interviewee is already serving as CEO or expects to be named to succeed her father as leader of the business. There are exceptions, however.

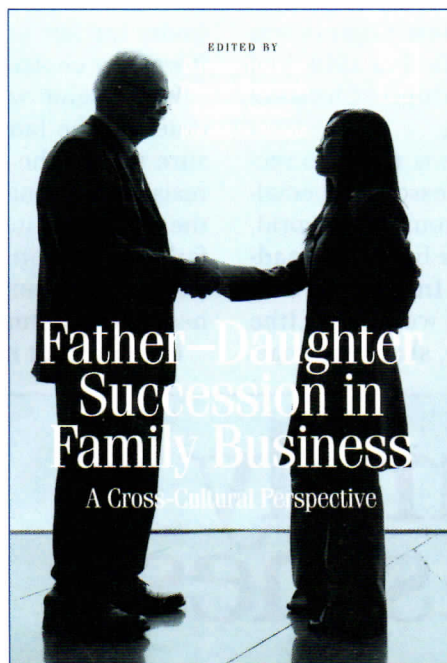
An article focusing on Nigeria does not include a case study; instead, it offers a section on “Why fathers do not hand over businesses to daughters.” Although the article from India features a case study, the authors note they had difficulty finding a daughter-successor to profile. Women they approached insisted “they were only managing the business and that they were not the successor in the family business,” the researchers report.

In a case from the United Arab Emirates, the daughter who is profiled serves as the company's chief operating officer; her brother is the CEO. And the woman featured in the profile from Egypt founded her own business, crediting the values and work ethic she absorbed from her father's example.

The case studies cover six continents: Asia (China, India, Lebanon, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines and United Arab Emirates), Africa (Egypt and Nigeria), Europe (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Russia, Spain, Scotland, Sweden and Switzerland), North America (Canada and U.S. cases from South Carolina, Washington state and West Virginia), South America (two cases from Brazil, Columbia and Peru) and Oceania (Australia and New Zealand).

There are drawbacks to this approach. As many of the articles point out in a section headed “Limitations,” one cannot draw conclusions about a nation's family business owners based on one case study. Two of the U.S. articles, for example, profile women who lead very small businesses, both with all-female work forces, and the third features a business in Appalachia; one can hardly make generalizations about father-daughter succession in the U.S. based on these cases.

Another caveat: In many of the case studies, the daughter was the only family member interviewed, so



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the reader lacks other relatives' perspective. What's more, some articles paraphrase the interviewee in lieu of reporting substantive direct quotations. The Italian case is the only one in which the authors note the use of secondary sources such as company documents and family information to verify interview data.

In a few of the profiles, the chief issues faced by the interviewee are more related to dysfunctional family relationships than to cross-gender succession (particularly one of the Brazil cases, which involves an 87-year-old patriarch who won't step down, two daughters vying for succession and a mother who, although she does not work for the business, barges in on important meetings).

Some articles in this compilation evidently date from a few years ago. The case study from West Virginia was co-authored by Cindy Iannarelli, who died in 2010, and the case from Egypt (which profiles a Coptic Christian family) doesn't mention the Arab Spring.

These caveats notwithstanding, there is much to recommend about this book. Female successors, especially, will be heartened to discover that around the world, daughters who follow their fathers as business leaders face the same types of challenges. In a profile of a French company, the authors write, "It would take [the daughter] 30 years of patience, presence, skill and tenac-

ity to be seen as the natural and obvious successor"—a situation that will likely ring true to many women.

A successor from Germany says her father "made a big mistake in not informing the employees what I would be doing." The informality of her entry into the business undermined her credibility, she reflects: "I believe that in my first two years no one took me seriously. But then I decided not to be content with that situation ... I started to call for changes, especially in terms of structure and development." Like many successors, she was the one who took the initiative to institute formal governance structures.

Many case study subjects describe their efforts to find a suitable work/life balance. "There are times when I am tired," says a Spanish successor with three children under the age of six, "but I cannot be surprised because it was my choice."

While some women say they were discouraged from entering the family business, others say they felt pressure to join the firm. A daughter from the Philippines resisted working in the family enterprise. "In the end," the authors write, "she realized she was the only one her father relied on to carry his dream.... Perhaps if Edna was a male, then the refusal to work in the family business and eventually take over may have prevailed."

In many (but not all) of these cases, the daughters who

took over from their fathers did not have a brother. The lack of a male heir likely smoothed their way to the top. As Colette Dumas, a pioneering researcher in the area of father-daughter succession, writes in an introduction to the book, "When a son doesn't succeed his father in the family enterprise, and when a daughter does, this is still a newsworthy event in the local and national press."

Readers of this compilation will be impressed by the skills and talents of these women from diverse backgrounds, many of whom have overcome considerable odds. Those who are extensively quoted demonstrate candor and perceptiveness.

"Of course, I am operating in a men's world," a business leader from Switzerland tells her interviewers. "But for me, this is actually quite comfortable: I get appointments a lot quicker than most people.... Obviously, it's not enough to just be blond ... you have to know what you are talking about, and you have to be able to deliver on your promises. As a woman, you are often scrutinized more than a man would be."

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